

Keeping the Seal in Good Hands

A major change affecting the Seal took place in 1789, shortly after the Constitution was ratified. Congress passed an act to rename the Department of Foreign Affairs, calling it the Department of State, and assigned both foreign and domestic duties to it. As one of these duties, Congress transferred custody of the Seal from the Secretary of Congress to the new agency, which is why the State Department holds the Seal today.

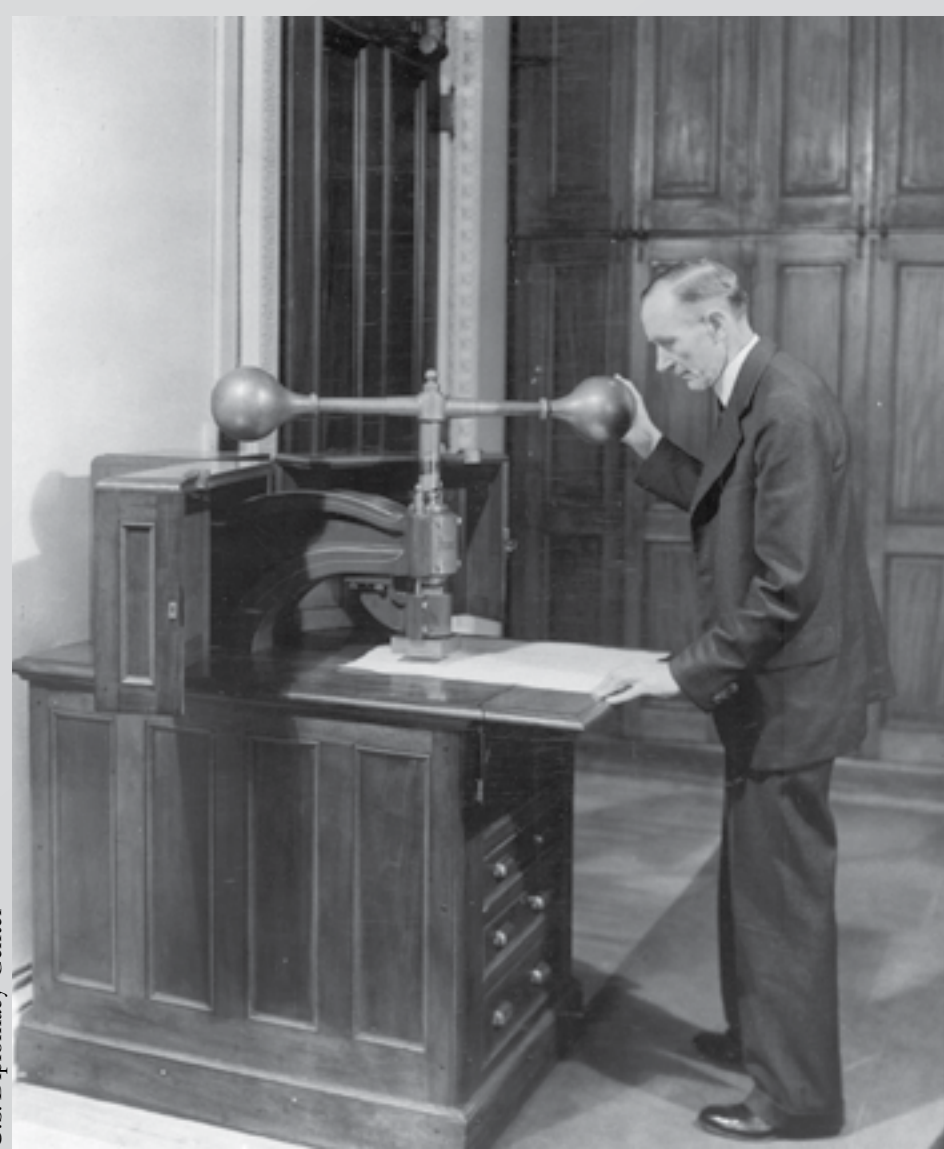
In 1789, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson was designated official custodian of the Great Seal as Secretary of State.

CAREFUL HANDS PRESS THE SEAL

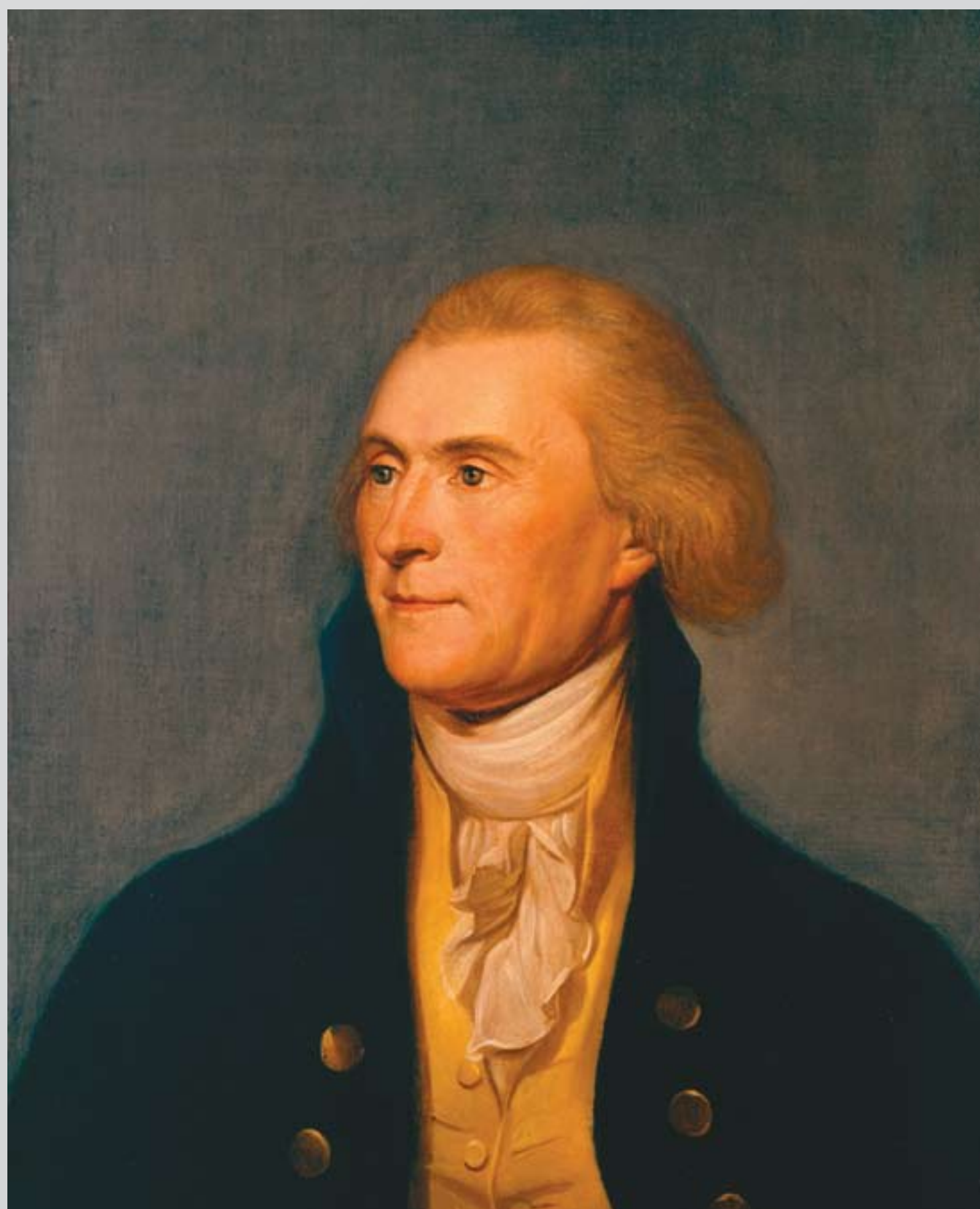
Although the Secretary is the official custodian of the Seal, designated clerks or officers have overseen its daily use, which includes pressing seals and affixing them to signed documents. None of the press mechanisms for creating Seals from 1782 – 1904 has survived.



George Bartle, above, cared for the seal from 1852 – 99, the longest serving custodian in Department history. This sketch by William Allen Rogers appeared in the March, 1878 *Harper's Magazine* along with an article about the Seal.



Seal caretaker, Percy F. Allen imprints a Seal using a press, die and cabinet that R. Hoe & Co. produced for the Department in 1903 and remains in use today. He was in charge of the Seal from 1924 to 1942.

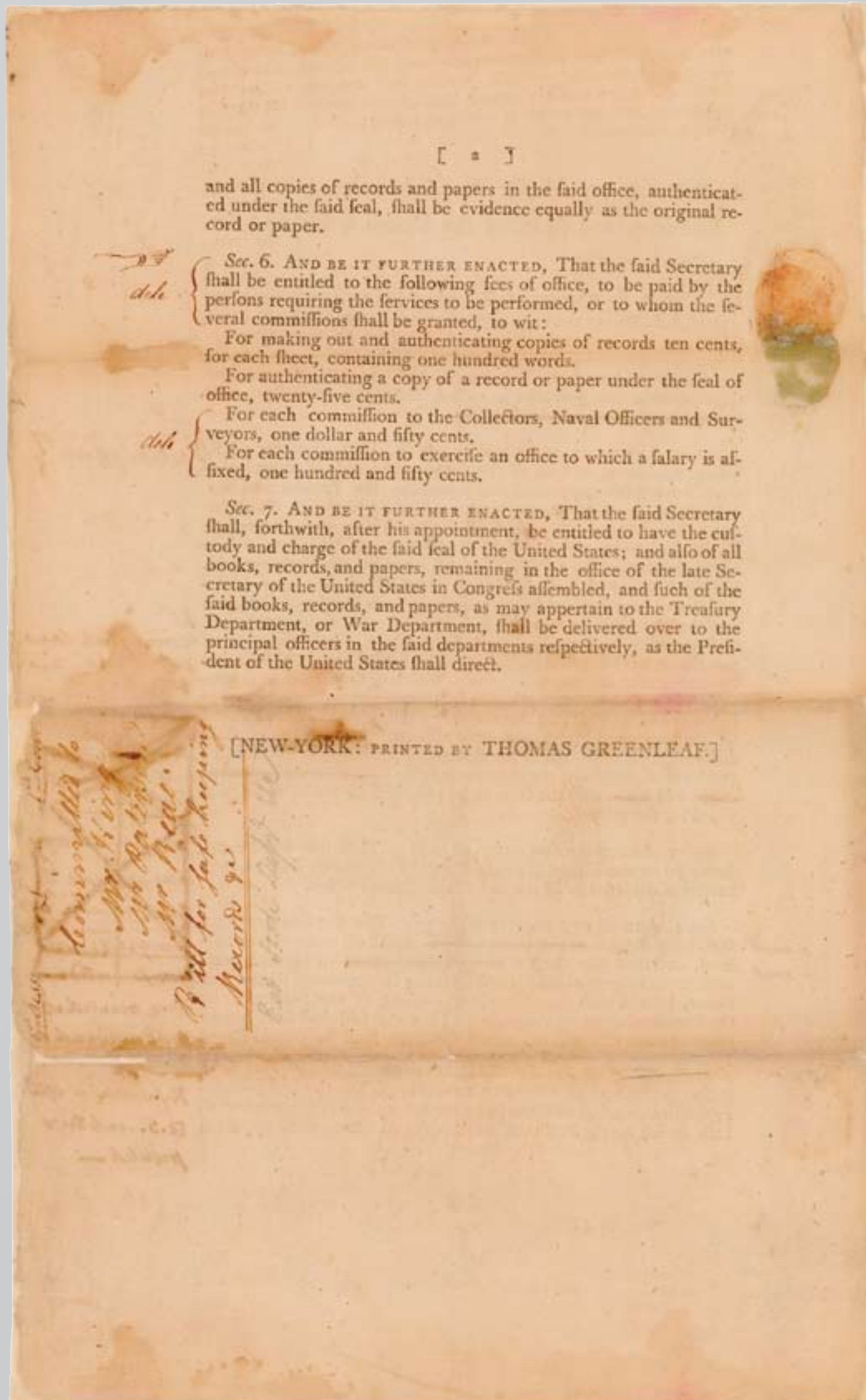
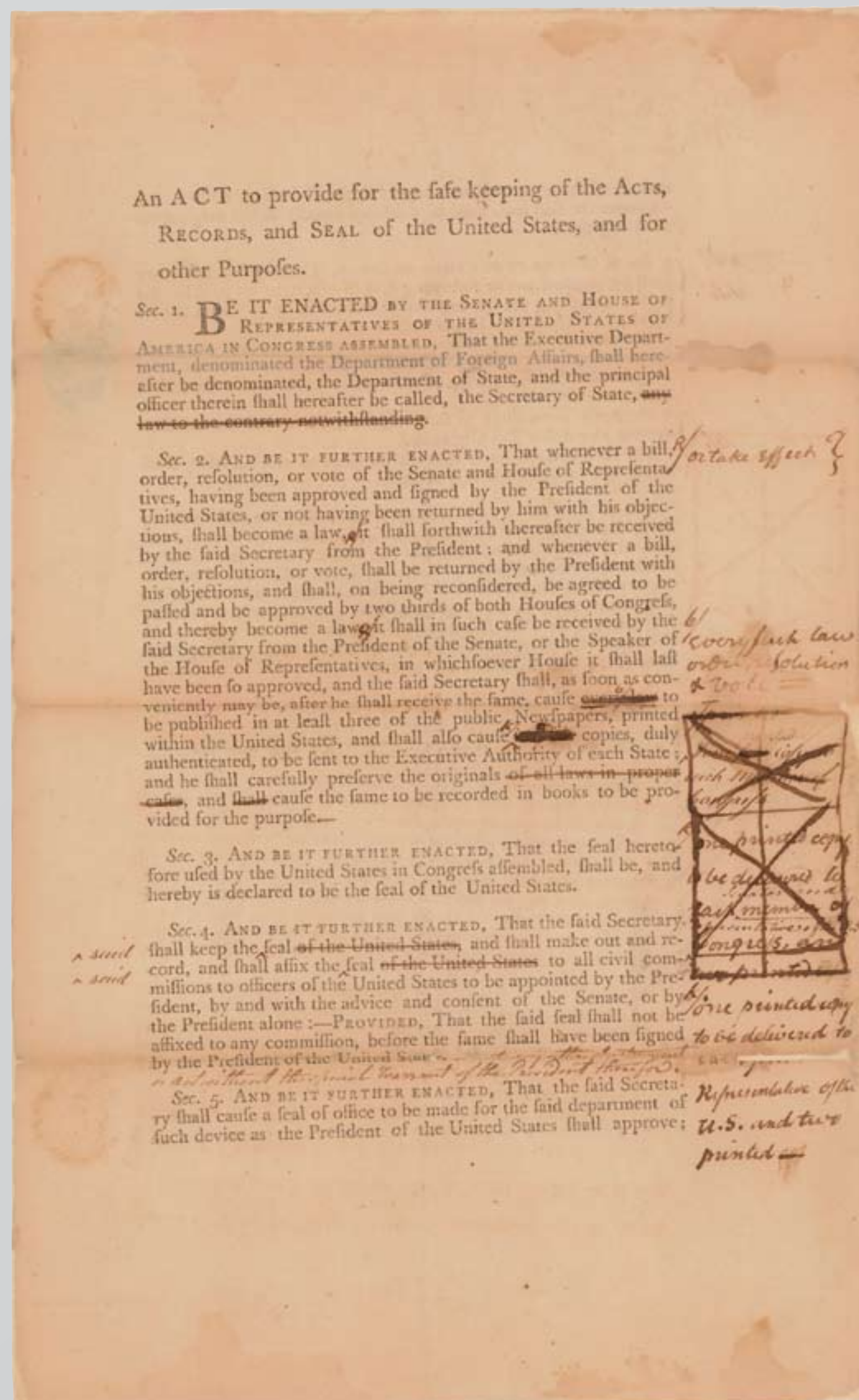


Portrait of Thomas Jefferson, Diplomatic Reception Rooms, U.S. Department of State



The Henry Rensen, Jr. House of the United States Patent Office by Dobson

From 1790 – 1792, Henry Rensen, Jr. became keeper of the Seal and in 1790 helped move the Department and the Seal from the seat of the federal government in New York to Pennsylvania.



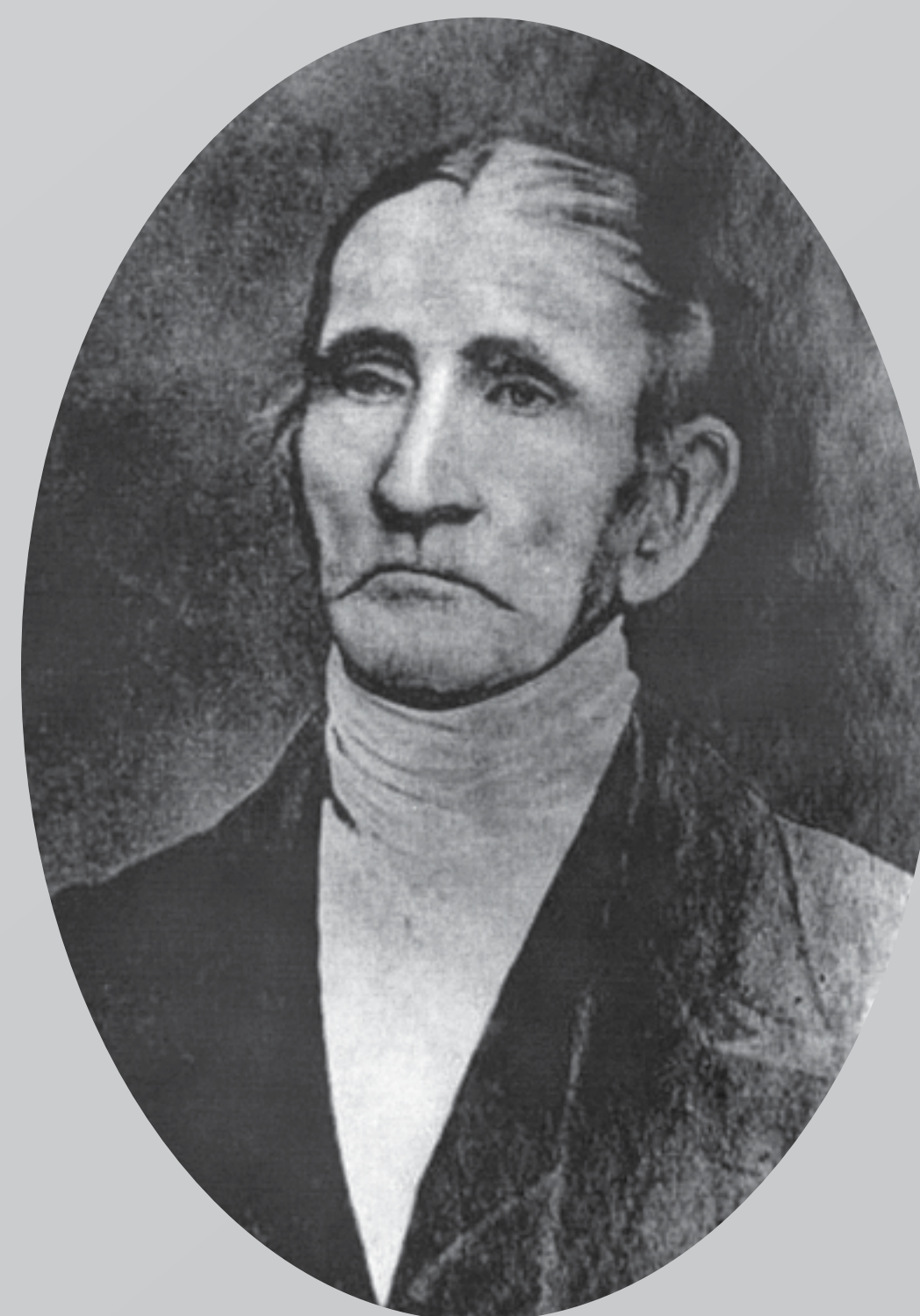
Bill version of the 1789 Act establishing the Department of State as keeper of the Seal, from the records of the U.S. Senate. Courtesy of the National Archives.

THE SEAL MEETS GRAVE DANGER— AND SURVIVES



Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol

In 1814, during the War of 1812, the British burned Washington's government buildings with flames visible for miles. The Seal could have been destroyed, but like the nation, survived.



www.nightboon.com

Stephen Pleasonton, keeper of the Seal, (left) helped rescue America's charter documents from destruction. The Seal also escaped harm, but no one knows who saved it.

THE SEAL TAKES PRIDE OF PLACE



U.S. Department of State

From 1945–1955 the Seal became “a stepchild of the Department,” in the words of Great Seal historian Richard S. Patterson. During this period the Department relocated into new quarters and the Seal was moved almost once a year.

In 1950, Clydia Mae Richardson became Chief of the Presidential Appointments. She directed efforts to secure a dignified and stable home for the Seal.

In 1955, she realized her aspirations. The Department put the Seal on display in a central location in its main building. In 1961 the Seal became a central focus of the new Department Exhibit Hall, where it resides today.

Clydia Mae Richardson operates the press with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles looking on, 1955

CREATING A SEAL TODAY

Today, Presidential Appointments Staff Section Chief Sharon Hardy of the Department's Office of Career Development and Assignments, is the keeper of the Great Seal. The following photos depict the materials required and steps taken to imprint a Great Seal for a document.

Seal Wafer



Photo: Alex Jamieson

Seal Counter-die



Photo: Alex Jamieson

Seal Press



Photo: Alex Jamieson

Imprinting



Photo: Alex Jamieson

The Seal



Photo: Alex Jamieson

During the Civil War, with the integrity of the United States being challenged, the South devised the Great Seal of the Confederacy. On this seal, George Washington rides a horse; the date 1862 commemorates the year Jefferson Davis became President and other symbols reflect the major agricultural products of the South. Today this Seal resides in the Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond VA.



Seal of the Confederacy, 1862 (replica)